



Inside CFSA



For Our Child-Serving Community

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CFSA Will Strive for 'Best Practices' in 2004

To build the District's first viable safety net for abused and neglected children and fragile families, CFSA is following the blueprint for child welfare reform in the court-ordered Implementation Plan (IP). A common theme among the plan's numerous performance standards and deadlines is transforming child welfare practices to reflect the values of improved safety, speedy permanence, and better current and future well being for every child in the system.

In the past, child welfare social workers had caseloads so large they could focus only on emergencies. A major success story in 2003 was to recruit more social workers to reduce individual caseloads. With that process well underway, CFSA is now turning to the challenge of implementing practice improvement.

Facilitated Family Team Meetings (FFTMs), now in the planning stages, herald a tide of upcoming practice change at CFSA. Structured meetings bring birth parents, extended family members, and friends together with professionals, foster families, and community members to consider all the options before removing a child from home. FFTMs signal a shift in approach—from CFSA driving the process to planning that is family-centered. With leadership from Clinical Practice and support from experts at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a group of CFSA staff and external stakeholders is developing a strategy for implementing FFTMs, a widely recognized best practice in child welfare.

"CFSA with its partners is tailoring a model of Facilitated Family Team Meetings to fit our community and needs," said Roque Gerald, director of CFSA Clinical Practice. "When family participation increases, we expect to see a marked improvement in stability, safety, and permanence for children."

Typically, about half the participants will be family members or supporters. Birth parents also help decide who will attend the meeting. These meetings should:

- Give families a voice and increase cooperation among families, foster families, service providers, the community and caseworkers.
- Uncover unexpected or unknown supports and resources in the extended family and community.
- Ensure that social workers base decisions on the best information available.
- Decrease the length of time children stay in foster care.

CFSA is planning to implement FFTMs by July for all children experiencing initial placement. In October, CFSA will expand the process to include children requiring a placement change.

New Process Speeds Adoptive Placement

CFSA has an obligation to reform one of the most tragic failures of the past by preventing children who cannot go home from languishing in foster care or waiting years to be adopted. Several performance goals in the Implementation Plan address this issue—for example, moving adoptable children into adoptive placements within nine months. The table illustrates how quickly IP performance benchmarks climb for this standard, reflecting the imperative of all due speed in obtaining nurturing, permanent homes for rapidly growing youngsters.

IP Benchmarks for Percentage of Adoptable Children in Pre-Adoptive Placement within Nine Months

Sept. 30, 2003	50%
Dec. 31, 2004	75%
Dec. 31, 2005	85%
Dec. 31, 2006	"full compliance"

CFSA met the most recent benchmark with 549 (50.9%) of 1,078 total adoptable children in pre-adoptive placement. However, we must do more to achieve permanence quickly for the remaining 529 waiting children—and for all those who become available for adoption in the future.

Our strategy for speeding development of specific recruitment plans for children available for adoption but not yet in pre-adoptive placement includes:

- Conducting regular permanency planning staffings for all adoptable children who need a recruitment plan.
- Dedicating four coordinator-facilitator teams to schedule, conduct, and follow up on staffings.
- Working with an expert from the Annie E. Casey Foundation who is reviewing and recommending improvements to this process.

"It's a collective and inclusive process that brings together parties involved in a case to move children to permanence carefully and expeditiously," stated Sandra Jackson, acting deputy director, Program Operations. "Looking at the broadest possible range of options for achieving a permanent home for each child will lead to speedier and higher quality outcomes."

CFSA Public Information faxes this newsletter monthly to providers and other partners. To provide comments or to update your fax number, call (202) 442-6015. Editor: Derek Stewart ■